



# Tule Lake Segregation Center granted monument status

By Charlie Unkefer  
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Tulelake, Calif. -



**Art Kameda, a longstanding member of the Tule Lake Preservation Committee, has worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the former Tule Lake Segregation Center. He said designation of the site as a National Historic Monument "is the culmination of years of work."**

The federal government on Dec. 5 designated the former Tule Lake Segregation Center as a National Historic Monument. The Tulelake California site is one of the nine areas identified as part of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument.

A White House press release announcing the decision stated, "The last of the nine designations will bring increased understanding of the high price paid by some Americans on the home front. The Tule Lake Segregation Center National Historic Landmark and nearby Camp Tule Lake in California were both used to house Japanese Americans relocated from the west coast of the United States."

The decision is heralded by many as a major step towards recognizing the injustices

perpetrated against Japanese Americans by the United States government during World War II.

Monument status is also seen as a major coup for the many organizations working to raise awareness around this inglorious and relatively unknown chapter in American history, among them are the Tule Lake Preservation Committee, the Tule Lake Committee, the Japanese American Citizens League, the Conservation Fund, and various federal agencies, including the National Park System, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Reclamation. On the state level, California State Parks and the California Department of Transportation have provided support, as well.

Local activist Art Kameda

Mount Shasta resident Art Kameda, a longstanding member of the Tule Lake Preservation Committee, has worked tirelessly to raise local awareness around the issue of Japanese American internment, as well as issues pertaining specifically to the Tule Lake site.

His elation over the recent federal designation was apparent. “This is the culmination of years of work,” he said. “My role has been to get the local community more involved in the issue and to raise awareness.” In doing so, Kameda has devoted countless hours to giving presentations throughout the region, educating the local populace on this consistently overlooked piece of American history.

Kameda has also served as a key area representative in lobbying for increased recognition for the site, which has evolved from a California Historic Site to a National Historic Landmark to its new status as a National Historic Monument. Kameda’s efforts have included, among other things, activating the administration of College of the Siskiyous, where he is employed as a computer technician, to help support the cause. In a recent e-mail circulated throughout the College by Kameda, he applauded the efforts of former COS president Dave Pelham, the Faculty Senate, the college Board of Trustees, and the CSEA (a union organization) for their support over the years.

He also expressed gratitude towards Siskiyou County Supervisor Jim Cook, Modoc County Supervisor Dave Bradshaw and Craig Dorman of the Lava Beds National Historic Monument.

History of internment

Shortly after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, allowing the US government to bypass the constitutional safeguards normally guaranteed to American citizens.

The Executive Order, a decree issued in the name of national defense, led to the evacuation and mass incarceration of over 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry. The vast majority of those incarcerated were US citizens. The incarceration lasted up to four years for many, and those detained were denied the right to due process of law.

In his seminal work titled “Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America’s Concentration Camps,” author Michi Nishiura Weglyn states, “Our government had in its possession proof that not one Japanese American, citizen or not, had engaged in espionage, not one had committed any act of sabotage.”

Weglyn’s book and others – such as the acclaimed novel, “Farewell To Manzanar” by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston, a well publicized PBS documentary “Children of the Camps,” and the recently released documentary “The Cats of Mirikitani” (which chronicles the life of artist and camp survivor Jimmy Mirikitani) – have all drawn attention to the issue Japanese American internment.

Kameda said, “The Tule Lake Segregation Center was the largest of the centers, detaining 18,000 people at its peak and was the most controversial of all the detention centers that held Japanese-Americans, as it was used to hold the ‘dissenters’ from the various camps.”

### Visiting the site

Visitors to the current site won’t find much of the original camp infrastructure. Though there is a plaque that commemorates the site and a few buildings remain, not much is left of the once sprawling detention center.

“It is our hope that this site will become an educational and historical site that reveals the stories of what happened to Japanese-Americans during World War II,” said Kameda. “We hope it will tell the whole range of stories, from the folks who joined the army and became part of one of the most highly decorated units (an all Japanese American unit) in the history of the United States Army to the stories of those who chose to show their dissent to the way they were being treated.”

Exactly what kind of funding will come from the recent Monument designation is unclear. “I think we have to wait and see how this pans out,” said Kameda.

The groups involved in the effort would like to see continued restoration of some of the remaining structures as well as the construction of an interpretative facility that would serve to educate visitors on the history of the camp.

“We hope to have a site that tells the whole story,” Kameda said. “If they do it like Manzanar (another internment camp, located near the town of Lone Pine, CA), that would be good.”

#### Others affected

Kameda emphasized that Japanese Americans were not the only ones affected by the camps. He noted specifically, “We also hope that it (the proposed facility) will tell the story of the local community and what they had to go through during this time. For instance, some Tulelake farmers lost their leases to the land (the land was used for the camps) and the farmers had a difficult time finding hired help, as the camps were hiring a lot of people who would otherwise have worked for them.”

Kameda noted, too, that the Monument stands to bring tourist dollars to the local economy. “May it be a win-win situation where people are educated about a very important and not-so-well-known part of our history and yet may it help our bring legacy tourism dollars into our local community.”

#### History not forgotten

Japanese American Citizens League National President Larry Oda, in a recent press release, stated, “The World War II experience of Japanese Americans should not be forgotten. Our Constitutional rights were illegally suspended during World War II because of racial prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership. Having Tule Lake as part of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument should serve as a reminder to future generations that this unjust action did occur, it was wrong, and it should not ever be allowed to happen.”

Other sites included in the World War II Valor in the Pacific Monument include five sites in the vicinity of Pearl Harbor itself, commemorating the attack that set the stage for America’s entrance into the war. Also included are three sites located in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, specifically on the islands of Attu, Kiska, and Agattu.